United Nations E/CN.6/2010/NGO/34

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 December 2009

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1-12 March 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement submitted by the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan and the Feminist League, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

09-65583 (E) 130110

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Statement

1. Recognizing the positive steps of States towards implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Central Asian region, the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan and the Feminist League are expressing our concern about the continuing challenges faced by poor and marginalized women in our region.

2. Women do not need only political declarations: women need adequate mechanisms, equal opportunities, adequate resources and real actions. After 15 years of promises, it is time to report not on what is done but on what is achieved.

3. We express our deep concerns about the very negative impact on the lives of women of growing religious fundamentalism, strengthening patriarchal attitudes towards women, globalization and militarism.

Violence against women

4. Violence against women grows and traditional and new forms of this violence create a high risk to women's security. Despite some actions, legislation is in need of further reform. Ineffective application and enforcement of existing laws continue to be problematic. Promised financial support has not been delivered in the Central Asian republics. State-funded crisis centres are non-existent. National plans of action initiated after Beijing are not achieving their goals due to lack of commitments and investments by Governments. Tasks regarding violence against women, such as organizing training programmes for law enforcement personnel and judges to raise gender awareness, supporting crisis centres, developing manuals for schools on prevention of violence against women, applying an intersectional approach in the organized response to violence against women, collecting gender statistics on all forms of violence against women and children, and monitoring and analysing the effectiveness of measures used, remain as tasks rather than achievements. Governments lack the adequate resources to implement many aspects of the anti-trafficking national programmes. There is no budget line in the State or municipality budgets for combating violence against women. There is no yearly amount earmarked in the State budgets for the support of non-governmental organizations, including for those organizations working in the field of violence against women. In Kyrgyzstan, there is no budget line for activities to end violence against women. The State has not created any crisis centres. Moreover, the State does not provide sustainable and consistent support to existing crisis centres.

5. We emphasize that domestic violence, forced marriage, bride kidnapping and sexual harassment are violations of human rights and not simply "women's issues". Bride kidnapping grew during the last decade. Impunity for such crimes should be stopped and the State should take a leading role in this process. Donors do not consider national plans of action on gender equality as serious parts of a country's development programmes.

6. We call for:

(a) Allocation of sufficient funds to combat violence against women, using the State budget and other resources, including setting up of municipal crisis centres and shelters;

(b) State measures to increase financing programmes, policies and implementation of laws related to violence against women;

(c) The establishment of special State departments on violence against women within the working bodies of the national machineries with adequate funds and staff to coordinate actions in the countries aimed at the reduction of violence against women;

(d) Effective measures aimed at stopping practices of bride kidnapping, polygamy, sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic violence and trafficking;

(e) The expansion of educational programmes at all levels to change traditional attitudes and stereotypes about violence against women in all forms;

(f) To ensure effective support by the State and international organizations for crisis centres, shelters, hotlines and women's non-governmental organizations dealing with violence against women;

(g) The establishment of domestic violence desks at each district branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs;

(h) Improved police performance in dealing with violence against women so as to ensure that the rights of victims of domestic violence, trafficking, sexual violence and all other forms of violence against women are properly protected;

(i) The establishment of a stronger and clearer punishment mechanism for offenders;

(j) The establishment of a mechanism of non-governmental organization experts in the field to feed information, knowledge and analysis into the State institutions that deal with violence against women.

Women's political empowerment

7. Women continue to be dramatically underrepresented in the highest decision-making positions in all five Central Asian republics. In Kyrgyzstan, there are no woman provincial governors. The following measures are needed: a State-run consistent programme and an effective implementation and monitoring mechanism on women's political empowerment; inclusion of women into decision-making bodies as heads of bodies; allocation of a State budget for these purposes and to overcome conservative and patriarchal attitudes preventing women's effective and full political participation. Equal representation and participation of women and men in decision-making represent one of the fundamental steps to address social and economic issues in an integrated way. We state that there is a need to implement the following commitments:

(a) To adopt and implement temporary special measures to increase the level of women's representation in all elected and appointed positions:

(i) To implement concrete strategies and actions on enforcement and implementation of the laws, programmes and plans of actions aimed at women's representation in decision-making bodies with concrete, measurable, time-bound indicators and responsible offices and officers in State organizations;

(ii) To set up a system of incentives towards non-discriminatory practice and policy in institutions, financed by the State, and to introduce a temporary programme of affirmative actions for the political advancement of women;

(iii) To review and assess the gender balance at all levels of decision-making periodically with the full participation of local governance structures;

(b) To start gender-responsive budgeting initiatives and allocate in the State budget funding for women's rights;

(c) To attract international financial support through the inclusion of women's rights into the country's priorities.

Impact of global crisis on women

8. Women suffer financial, economic and social impacts from the global economic crisis at the macroeconomic, microeconomic and personal levels. Current economic structures and relations reflect deep-rooted discrimination towards women and in this crisis period, their position worsens, including furthering of their economic disempowerment. Women of Central Asia already had unequal access to economic and financial resources and decision-making — more than 85 per cent of wealth in our countries is owned by men. Women entrepreneurs have fewer opportunities to access financial resources because real wealth is concentrated in men's hands. In rural Kyrgyzstan, only 12 per cent of heads of farms are female, while more then 90 per cent of arable land, cattle, poultry and agricultural and processing machinery are owned by men. Investments in agricultural sectors are planned. Who will benefit? Owners, the majority being men. An increase of women's ownership is not planned. Another example of this kind concerns Kazakhstan, where out of 9,460 rural microcredits from the "Financial support to agriculture fund", only 31 per cent went to women. Women are not addressed in Central Asia as victims — nor as beneficiaries; women are not a priority concern for States. No concrete data are available; no materials are analysed and used to inform social and economic policy in support of primarily working-class women and women's businesses. In order for there to be an adequate understanding of concrete and detailed information on the impact of the current crisis as well as of other processes on women, the great and urgent need to strengthen national institutional machineries and real gender mainstreaming in all line ministries of the Governments must be addressed.

9. We call for establishing special international, regional and national funds for support of women's economic initiatives, strengthening women's capacity to be economic agents, increasing State expenditures on caregiving facilities, and ensuring the full participation of all Central Asian countries in shaping appropriate international responses to the crisis. Women have suffered the most from the crisis. Women should be present at the table when solutions are being discussed. There is a need for women's involvement to ensure that substantial resources are effectively used and to support economic growth rooted in gender equality and social justice.